

# Courier Correo Courrier

April 2020  
Volume 35, Number 1



**Mennonite  
World Conference**  
A Community of Anabaptist  
related Churches

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## Cover Photo:

**Ecumenical dialogue: an interdenominational banquet, a gift to the global church.**

Illustration: Yosephine Sulistyorini

## Courier Correo Courier



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## A word from the editor



### Who is with us

“They showed us unusual kindness” (Acts 28:2).

That was the theme of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity this year in the northern hemisphere. The churches represented at the gathering were not the ones I, as a Mennonite Brethren, normally have a close affiliation with: United, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Catholic, Orthodox.

The formality of the service with its liturgy written word-for-word in the handout may have been unfamiliar, but the Spirit of God among the worshippers as we sang, read Scripture, prayed and listened to the sermon together was very familiar.

It got me thinking about Jesus’ words in Mark 9:40: “Whoever is not against us is for us.”

It seems to me that we often flip this statement – “whoever is not *for* us is *against* us” – and we use it to build walls between us and others, even others of the same faith. However, this seems to be the opposite of what Jesus was telling the disciples. To the disciples who are eager to point out how other people are doing things wrong, it seems that Jesus is saying anyone who claims the name of Jesus is an ally – even if they talk about the gospel a little bit differently.

And that makes me think of hope. The theme of Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday in 2020 is “Jesus Christ, our hope.” This is a message that never gets old.

It is easy to find bad news: within our global Anabaptist family, Colombia is steeped in violence after years of civil war; Venezuela and Zimbabwe are in economic crisis; Burkina Faso and India experience flashes of religious violence; DR Congo is both cause of and shelter from displacement; in the Philippines and Indonesia, seismic and weather disasters threaten the most vulnerable citizens; and many people are suffering from general anxiety or outright trauma. In addition, the whole world is in a state of uncertainty about COVID-19.

What a breath of freedom in this statement that we find hope in Jesus.

Additionally, there can be hope in getting to know his other followers too. Even the ones we have disagreed with.

This issue of *Courier* presents the Faith and Life Commission’s statement on ecumenicity, passed by the General Council in Kenya in 2018. It provides a framework for how we as Anabaptist Mennonites can approach others within the Christian tradition with whom we have differences in theological perspective. How to get along with those who are also *for* Jesus Christ, our hope.

In the Perspectives section, we read stories from church leaders around the world who share experiences of collaborating interdenominationally, sharing the message of Jesus Christ, our hope.

May this issue encourage you to consider how to show unusual kindness to the theological strangers close to you – crossing barriers of church tradition – for the sake of the good news.

**Karla Braun is editor of Courier and writer for Mennonite World Conference. She lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.**

**Courier is interested in your contributions. An upcoming issue will look at how we engage with religious traditions outside of Christianity. Do you have drawings, paintings, sculpture or photographs that depict interreligious dialogue? Submit your artwork/graphic art to [photos@mw-cmm.org](mailto:photos@mw-cmm.org) for consideration for use in Courier. Please ensure images are full resolution. Include artist’s name and local church. Include a short description of the artwork.**



## Identity and Ecumenicity

# A Theology of Interchurch Hospitality and Denominational Identity

by Alfred Neufeld Friesen

**M**ennonite World Conference embarked on the first formal dialogue process with the Baptist World Alliance in 1989. Since then, MWC has entered into conversations with Lutheran World Federation, Seventh Day Adventists, Catholics, and, most recently, a five-year trilateral dialogue with Lutherans and Catholics. Seeing the value of these dialogues, the Faith and Life Commission developed this document to give MWC national churches and local congregations a better

*understanding of the theological basis for ecumenical hospitality and why we think such conversations are consistent with Anabaptist values. The document was approved as an MWC teaching resource by the General Council in Limuru, Kenya, April 2018.*

### Introduction

When we speak of the global church of Christ in the context of Mennonite World Conference, the apostle Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth offers a helpful point of reference. In chapter 13, which focuses on the theme of love, Paul recognizes that all human



Photo: Henk Stenvers

knowledge—even Christian, theological and denominational knowledge—is limited. As we do theology we know only “in part” (1 Corinthians 13:9), seeing the truth as a “reflection in a mirror” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Our knowledge, as well as our capacity to understand, is always influenced by our perspective. In the eternal presence of God things will be different (1 Corinthians 13:12). But for now this is all we have. In our journey as human beings – limited by time, space, and our five senses – our knowledge is always partial and our understanding of the Truth is shaped by our context and personal perspectives.

This is why we should be considerate, patient, empathetic, and, above all, loving with each other. “Where there is knowledge,” writes Paul, “it will pass... For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror darkly... Now I know in part. Then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:8,13). So whenever Christians from different theological traditions meet and dialogue with each other, we should do so in the spirit of the three great Christian virtues that will endure.

Paul also notes that as Christians we speak different languages—both literally and in the sense of our various theological identities, historical developments and contextual realities. “Undoubtedly,” writes Paul, “there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me...” (1 Corinthians 14:10–11).

These are genuine limitations. But recognizing this can also become a freeing experience – I am free to reaffirm my identity and my point of view, since “that is the only one I have.” But I’m also free to recognize the possibility that others have their own understandings, their own point of view, their own historical and contextual limitations. And it is also freeing to know that all of this can happen in the spirit and the power of “faith, hope, and love.”

### **We Need Confessional-Denominational Identity**

One can lament the split of the Christian church into so many denominations and traditions. But this reality after 2000 years of Christianity is not necessarily a bad thing, as long as we remember the Lord’s Prayer for Christian unity in John 17. Indeed, denominational identities may be useful or even necessary:

1.1. No single church or denomination is able to grasp the whole richness of God; diversity is essential in order to build unity. For the body to function



**Open our arms  
and minds  
to embrace  
the broad shoulders  
of a church  
bigger than  
we can imagine.  
#WorldWideChurch**

**Renewal 2027’s first event marking the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism and today’s diverse global family met at a Catholic conference centre in Germany.**

Photo: Wilhelm Unger

well, the eye must be an eye; the ear must be an ear; the hand must be a hand (1 Corinthians 12:15–20). If these differences are abolished, the body cannot survive.

- 1.2. Throughout history, denominations have helped apply the gospel to specific situations. For example, in a time when the church was wealthy and embroiled in worldly politics, the Franciscans wanted to live the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in a radical way. In a time when some Christians were paying for the forgiveness of sins, Luther rediscovered the gospel of free grace. The Anabaptists dared to insist on the biblical practice of voluntary baptism and non-violence, breaking with the status quo endorsed by the Catholic and Protestant state churches even at the cost of harsh persecution and exile. The Methodists arose in a time of needed revival; and the Pentecostals emerged in a context of racial discrimination and institutional rigidity.
- 1.3. Denominations provide correctives: At its beginning, every denomination emerged as a corrective to spiritual or ethical problems within the church. That is why denominations must

remain flexible. What was true and needed in one moment could become wrong and useless in a different historical or cultural setting. This happened to the people of Israel with the iron serpent: once a symbol of salvation, it later became an object of idolatry. That is why denominations must be open to renewal—to correct what is wrong and address possible biblical deficits – if they want to stay true to the spirit of their founding mothers and fathers.

- 1.4. Each denomination carries specific gifts and graces that must be shared for the benefit of all. The interdenominational Christian “banquet” is a true and wonderful gift to the global church because we can learn so much from each other: the erudition of the Jesuits, for example, or the simple life style of the Franciscans; the Christ-centered mysticism of Meister Eckhart, John of the Cross, and Gerhard Tersteegen; the zeal for missions, Christian education, and spirituality of the Pietists; the biblicalism, non-violence, believer’s church convictions of the Anabaptists; *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, and *sola scriptura* of the Lutherans; God’s sovereignty and glory in the Calvinist

tradition; the Christian “method” of the Methodists; the personal evangelism of the Baptists; the community discernment of the Quakers; simple living of the Amish; the transcendental dimension of divine power of the Pentecostals; the “upside-down” kingdom of Latin American “base communities,” etc.

Therefore, it is not uniformity but diversity that contributes to the building up of the one body of Christ (Ephesians 4:1–16).

### We Need Christ-Centred Ecumenicity

Churches and denominations should not remain alone or isolated from each other. They need interchurch hospitality and dialogue.

- 2.1. Churches should celebrate the one body of Christ. Ephesians 4:4–6 reminds us that there is just one Spirit, one Hope, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, and one divine Father. When Christ returns, people from “every nation, tribe, people and language” will join as one community of praise to welcome him (Revelation 7:9). Other passages in scripture affirm that there is just one “bride of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:7); one “people of God” (1 Peter 2:9–10); one “family of faith” (Galatians 6:10); one “body of Christ” (Romans 12:5); one “kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 16:19). Beyond the history of denominations the church is an existential unity united through its redemption in the triune God.
- 2.2. This means that as children of God we are all “siblings.” Ephesians 3:14–15 informs us that our common kinship with God makes us family and relatives. The saying “You can choose your friends, but you cannot choose your family” is valid for interchurch relations: Whoever belongs to Christ is my brother or my sister. From an eternal point of view there are no “first cousins” nor “second cousins” nor “distant relatives” in the “household of God.”
- 2.3. Distinct churches and traditions can potentially complement each other.

## Therefore, it is not uniformity but diversity that contributes to the building up of the body of Christ.

Romans 12:4–5 and 1 Corinthians 12:12–20 insist that members of the one body are different, but that their diversity enables the body to function as it should. To be sure, not all members are equal in nature and function: one head coordinates a divine work. Yet if the body is going to function well, differences among members are essential. No one can dismiss another member of the body of Christ as if he could do without him. No one has all the gifts needed. The body is more than ear, mouth or eye. This is true both for the local congregation as well as for the shared pilgrimage of different Christian traditions.

- 2.4. Churches are called to help each other and to build each other up. Weak members need the strong ones; and there are times when the weakness or vulnerability of one member of the body reveals the character of Christ. As Paul writes, “those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honour” (1 Corinthians 12:22–23).

### Conclusion

In the household of God (*ecumene*) we need to be ready to live in “reconciled diversity,” being both *brave* in claiming our denominational heritage, legacy and contribution, and *humble* in acknowledging our limited understanding.

Whatever truth God has placed into the different denominations and their history needs to be heard, preserved, and articulated. Minorities should not be overpowered by majorities.

But even as we recognize healthy diversity there is also a need for humility. Not everything in our specific denominational histories is good, biblical and pleasing to God. Many splits could have been avoided. Many memories need to be healed. Many condemnations stand in need of repentance and reconciliation. Sins and errors from the past must be confessed and forgiven.

After all, the church has received the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18–19). And if our witness is going to be credible to the watching world, reconciling work must begin in the “household of God” (Ephesians 2:19). This commitment to a ministry of reconciliation will undoubtedly take many forms. In some instances, it may imply full, formal unity in all aspects of church life and practice; with other groups it may only be a functional unity, in which we agree to collaborate on a limited number of initiatives. But in every instance our ecclesial orientation will be in the direction of reconciliation rather than an identity that is anchored primarily in our differences.



**Alfred Neufeld Friesen of Asuncion, Paraguay, was chair of the MWC Faith and Life Commission at time of writing. He is an elder in Vereinigung der Mennoniten Brüder Gemeinden Paraguays, the national Mennonite Brethren church. He is president of Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay (Protestant University).**

#### Notes:

“Ecumenicity” is understood here as a tendency and willingness toward dialog and cooperation with other Christian denominations or church Traditions. The word “Ecumenicity” comes from the Greek root *oikos* (house) and *menein* (living) (οἰκουμένη), which is equivalent to “the whole Christian family that dwells in the house of God.”

1 Corinthians 13:12: “reflection in a mirror” – literally “as an enigma” (Greek *ainigmati*).



# Perspectives

In “A Theology of Interchurch Hospitality and Denominational Identity,” the Faith and Life Commission encourages MWC member churches to be brave and humble as we celebrate being part of the body of Christ together. Our dialogue with other church groups can happen at a high level, as the Faith & Life Commission represents MWC in dialogue with leaders of other world communions. But it can also happen through local church relationships between pastors and congregations. These Perspectives column tell stories of the latter.

## Hong Kong

# The blessing of an ecumenical team



An ecumenical Christmas choir in a Hong Kong subway station.

Photo: Jeremiah Choi

by Jeremiah Choi

“**H**ark the herald angels sing...”  
Voices ring through the open area of a Hong Kong subway station on Christmas Eve.

For more than 10 years, 10 different churches in our area join together to sing Christmas carols at our local subway station.

We divide into four teams, each representing two or three churches, who singing Christmas carols together as we walk through our neighbourhoods. Then, we all join together to sing at the open area of the subway station.

My highlight was the year I conducted the “choir” singing Christmas songs. There were 500 people to singing these songs about Jesus together. With all those people, we did not need any loudspeakers for the choir – they were loud enough. What a wonderful experience.

### Easter joint worship

Another function on which we work

**It is a blessing that we can come together as pastors from different churches and share our wisdom and our burdens.**

together with other denominations on is the Easter joint worship. About 10 churches in our area join together on Easter Sunday. We have our Easter morning worship on a football court together. In the afternoon, we have a gospel carnival which allows unchurched people to hear about Jesus as they come to play.

All these begin with a prayer meeting of the pastors in the area. I have being joining this prayer meeting for more than 20 years. When we come together, we share about our joy and our difficulties. We pray for each other, and we pray for the area. We even have a yearly retreat together.

### “Who are the Mennonites?”

As the pastor of a Mennonite church, I am frequently asked “What is Anabaptist?” or “Who are the Mennonites?” – not only by newcomers to my church but also other pastors.

In this group that holds services together, there are people from Baptist, International Foursquare Gospel, Pentecostal, and Cumberland Presbyterian churches. Of course there are differences between us, but the most important is that we love each other and we can work

together to do more for our Lord Jesus Christ. As we come together, we respect our different traditions and our theologies, and we focus on what we have in common through Jesus Christ, our hope.

### “What is the standpoint of the church?”

Over the last year, Hong Kong has experienced one of the most difficult times in her history. In our churches, it has been difficult as well. A common question for people in our congregations is “What is the standpoint of the church?” Pastors have been very busy answering these questions and at the same time settling down even conflicts within their churches among people who have different perspectives on the answers to those questions.

It is a blessing that we can come together as pastors from different churches and share our wisdom and our burdens. This is very important because we know that we are not alone: we have God and these coworkers standing together. When the MWC delegation from the Peace Commission and Deacons Commission visited Hong Kong in December 2019, they gave teachings on peace to this group of pastors.

As a pastor of a small church, I am blessed to have so many pastors praying and working together in the area. So, not only do I have my international coworkers within the Mennonite circle, but I also have ecumenical coworkers in my local. We will have differences, but we can work together. We love each other as a team. We are brothers and sisters in the Lord. Hallelujah!



Jeremiah Choi is trained as a composer and a pastor. He currently serves as pastor of Agape Mennonite Church, Hong Kong, and as Mennonite World Conference regional representative for Northeast Asia.

## Mexico

# Building paths with those who are different

by **Fernando Pérez Ventura**

**B**ecause each Latin American country has its own socio-political, historical and, of course, economic reality, the ecumenical landscape in each is different. Also, the religious context adds its own colour to the ecumenical dynamic. I will talk about this in the context of Mexico City.

### Opportunities for cohesion

The situation in my country in 1997 is important. The political changes that came about from the elections that year are especially relevant. It was then that the engineer Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano came to power in the city. He was from the Mexican Left and promoted opportunities for cohesion through dialogue that sought unity among the various social and religious sectors of the city. He proposed possibilities for social, economic and political change at the time.

Out of this arose a stronger social movement that learned to be more astute in its interactions with the ruling powers in the country.

It is within this context that ecumenical encounters with people from different religious institutions came about. The intention was to foment an inter-religious dialogue whose voice could be heard in the midst of this social movement.

### An Anabaptist theological vision

As an Anabaptist under these circumstances, I always felt sure that our

theological vision had something to offer. This was a space where all the men's and women's voices were heard. Regardless of what we think about intervening (or not) in social and political issues, contact with others (who are different from ourselves) will always be enriching.

In general, the Christian churches in Mexico tend to reject one another – with adverse consequences for the ecumenical movement. Even so, there are leaders in the denominations who understand ecumenism as a space for dialogue, work and mutual accompaniment in our faith walk.

**Regardless of what we think about intervening in social and political issues, contact with others (who are different from ourselves) will always be enriching.**

In this sense, there were a number of encounters for dialogue where Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians/Anglicans, Baptists, Pentecostals and Catholics were present. A number of these leaders continue to be my friends and brothers in the faith and in building the Kingdom here on Earth.

This accompaniment helped us to extend the vision and meaning of ecumenism beyond meetings and incorporate it into the development of service projects and social and political advocacy.

### We follow Jesus who is our hope

The ecumenical imperative comes from Jesus' prayer during the passion vigil in Gethsemane. There, by way of his prayer to God, he declared his irrevocable commitment and will that Christians love one another. Jesus pleaded that his disciples "may all be one so that the world may believe" (John 17:21). This is a timeless prayer that challenges Christianity in general, as well as Anabaptism in particular.

Our response depends upon the intentional way in which we carry out the ministry of the Kingdom of God in this world. The ecumenical dream is not realized through good intentions, but rather through intentionally building paths by acting together with those who are different.



Fernando Pérez Ventura was a pastor in Mexico City, Mexico, for 34 years. For three years, he has worked with Mennonite Mission Network in several countries in Latin America. Along with his wife Rebeca González Torres, he coordinates CITA (Comunidad de Instituciones Teológicas Anabautistas), an Anabaptist theological network for Latin Americans. He is currently serving with Mountain States Mennonite Conference in the USA.

## United States

# Follow the fire: walking with Jesus in the Spirit's presence

by Gerald Shenk

It had been more than 15 years since we last lived in Zagreb, now the capital of Croatia, when we returned for a brief visit in 2006. Sitting at a sidewalk cafe on a sunny Saturday morning, my wife Sara and I spotted posters around town that would surely not have been allowed during our earlier times in former Yugoslavia when communists held sway: "March for Jesus!" Scanning the info, I could not discern which denomination might be sponsoring the event. Curious, we next discovered the procession itself, wending a joyful way through the city centre over to what locals call *Cvjetni trg* ("flower square").

Still puzzling about what kind of people could pull together such a public demonstration of faith, we were suddenly hailed by one of the organizers, who exclaimed with delight: "This started in your living room!"

Stanko had been one of several young Pentecostal church leaders who gathered monthly with us during 1988 and 1989 for prayer across the denominational barriers that ordinarily kept folks in their separate flocks. Baptist, Pentecostal, Brethren and several other independent-minded branches of the small neo-Protestant movement welcomed the opportunity to confer, pray and build bonds of friendship during the harsh times that plunged the region into chaos and war as the 1990s unfolded.

Long after we had returned to North America, these promising ties had grown into cooperation for many aspects of witness, war relief and outreach to neighbours, in faith.

In the darkest hours of the Wars in the Balkans (1991–95, and beyond), faith-based peacemaking efforts drew deeply from the wells of ecumenical and even inter-faith cooperation. In Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia, followers of Jesus felt called to cross boundaries, build bridges, practice forgiveness and extend basic human hospitality to persons in extreme danger from horrific violations on all sides.

Some MWC readers will know of the witness of Hleb Života (Bread of Life humanitarian organization) in Belgrade, or Pontanima (inter-faith choir) in Sarajevo. These and many other efforts have made a lasting contribution to peacebuilding in the wake of human-made catastrophes in the region.

Because of my extensive involvement with Pentecostal Christians in the Balkans, it has been my privilege in more recent years to participate in official denominational dialogues between Mennonite Church USA and some parts of the wider Pentecostal movement.

The Church of God (based in Cleveland, Tennessee, USA) has been a partner for several rounds of theological discussions on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, in worship and outreach and mission. Many participants voiced keen interest in Anabaptist experiences where Jesus' followers, in the power of God's Spirit, act as agents of reconciliation and peace in current human conflicts.

God is still forging new things among us as the Spirit continues breaking down walls of hostility and sending us forth as ambassadors with the power of Christ's love.

Toward that end, I am inspired by Shane Claiborne, Christian activist in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania, USA), who urges us to learn from the best of what many diverse Christian traditions have to offer each other:

"Just as we critique the worst of the church, we should also celebrate her at her best," Shane Claiborne writes in the journal *Oneing*. "We need to mine the fields of church history and find the treasures, the gems.... I want the fire of the Pentecostals, the love of Scripture of the Lutherans, the political imagination of the Anabaptists, the roots of the Orthodox, the mystery of the Catholics, and the zeal of the Evangelicals."

I'm convinced that we are all much more a mixture of these many strands than we usually admit. We all drink from streams

**We all drink from streams that include ancient Orthodox Christian worship formulations, deeply Catholic reflective traditions, robust Lutheran convictions, classic Reformed doctrines, and warmly Pietist practices – along with some forms of Anabaptist commitments and beliefs.**

that include ancient Orthodox Christian worship formulations, deeply Catholic reflective traditions, robust Lutheran convictions, classic Reformed doctrines, and warmly Pietist practices – along with some forms of Anabaptist commitments and beliefs that the earliest generations might or might not recognize as akin to their own.

We hybridize and select and respond to new situations while drawing from diverse source materials. Taken altogether, these colorful threads become our own new fabric, a tapestry that belongs to our own time and is meant as a gift to our contemporaries.

Side by side, the mighty river of Pentecostals today and the heirs of the Anabaptist stream of the Christian tradition may seem fairly remote from each other, but the underground reality is more closely connected than one would first detect. Where we find ourselves working together, there is a hope that the forces of prophetic zeal, impassioned witness and basic compassion can revitalize the paths of Spirit-empowered discipleship in a complex world.



Gerald Shenk taught in seminaries in Croatia, Serbia, and the USA (Virginia and Indiana), before taking up grandpa duties with a small farm in Virginia. He is a member of Springdale Mennonite Church.



## Germany

# Receptive ecumenism: Becoming vulnerable to the other

by Fernando Enns

**T**here is a moment when everything changes among the students who take the Mission and Ecumenism course at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The student composition of this compulsory course is quite diverse; the majority represent shades from the Reformed tradition: some (mostly young men) who consider themselves as “conservative” or biblicist; some (mostly women) are “liberals.” There are Baptists (“evangelical”), Mennonites (considered the most liberal), Pentecostals and students without a clear religious affiliation.

Most of the students are rather skeptical about ecumenism. Some do not believe there is any need to reflect on their relation to other Christians. Others believe that inter-Christian relations are irrelevant in the context of multi-religious encounters and extreme secularism.

### Laying the foundation

During the first sessions of the course, my Reformed colleague Heleen Zorgdrager and I lead the students to study biblical texts on the unity of the church, like John 17 or Ephesians 4.

As we reflect on ecclesiology (the nature of the church), we discover that “being one” is an essential mark of the church in every tradition.

We also learn about the history of the ecumenical movement.

Up to this point, most students prefer to stay in their comfort-zone. They have learned to “tolerate” others, but I sense they hold stereotypes about each other (and their Mennonite professor).

None of them really question what they have believed so far. And I encourage them to present their own identity, to cherish what they have learned from their belief systems and personal experiences with church.

### Becoming receptive

Then comes a moment when everything changes.

## Becoming receptive to the other is quite different from trying to convince others why my way is not only legitimate, but superior.

This usually happens when I introduce the concept of “receptive ecumenism.” Instead of asking *What do other traditions need to learn from mine, the leading question is What are the weaknesses that I experience in my own community? And Are there “gifts” in other traditions that could help me to overcome these weaknesses?* Paul Murray who has developed this approach at the Durham Centre for Catholic Studies says the assumption is that “if all were asking this question seriously and acting upon it, then all would be moving in ways which would both deepen our authentic respective identities and draw us into more intimate relationships.”

Of course, there is some reluctance in the beginning. The students split up into groups of three or four, composed of different backgrounds. This provides a safe space to share problems, difficulties, challenges – even pain – they experience in their own community.

### Sharing vulnerably

When they return to the larger group, everything feels different. Students now report, sometimes with tears in their eyes, the experiences they never thought they could share with anyone, let alone someone outside their own circles.

The other students listen in a very sensitive way. All the arrogance and ignorance from earlier sessions is gone.

Now they relate to each other, gradually building trust. It is no longer tolerance in the sense of indifference, but a real interest in the other and an honest, common search for biblical wisdom and theological reflection that meets the reported challenges.

Students start to ask each other: *How do you do that in your community? On what grounds? Why can't I do that/believe that in my own church? Or can I?*

Now, the classroom becomes a real ecumenical space, an image of the “one household of God” in all its diversity. We have become believers who seek to strengthen each other in faith by sharing doubts in the presence of the other. *Can we receive together that which is of God?*

### Receiving the gifts

For me, it is always a miracle how the spirit changes, how gently the students behave toward each other, how cautious they are in pointing to the strengths of the other's tradition.

Having been involved in official ecumenical dialogues and institutions over decades, I realize that becoming receptive to the other is quite different from trying to convince others why my way is not only legitimate, but superior. Unless I make myself vulnerable to the other – trusting that he/she will not destroy my faith, but become a companion in growing it – I will not be able to receive the gifts of a global church that celebrates its reconciled diversity as a blessing from God.

Besides, isn't this approach exactly the wisdom of the peace-church, which teaches non-violence as yet another essential mark of the church of Christ? Being nonviolent to another opinion, culture, mentality, tradition makes my own faith vulnerable. As we know from our own history, this takes a lot of courage and deep trust in God's guiding Spirit.

I am proud of my students for their confidence! And I learn a lot from them.



Fernando Enns is a member and vice-chair of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden in Germany*. Professor at the Vrije Universiteit in the Netherlands and at the University of Hamburg (Germany), he has participated in MWC's trilateral dialogues with the Lutheran World Federation and Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and is a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.

## South Africa

# From teaching math to multiplying churches

by Reverend Benedict Ndlovu

**S**chool graduations, church conferences, crime awareness and prayer meetings. All these take place in our church building with participation from local churches across denominations. We have many opportunities to be peacemakers in our area, working side-by-side with other churches to share the gospel.

### My story

I was a high school teacher majoring in mathematics, history, and counselling students after moving to South Africa from Zimbabwe to further my studies with the University of Johannesburg in 2001. But the Hillbrow Brethren In Christ Church, which was experiencing leadership challenges, called me to be their pastor in 2002.

We conducted a lot of leadership workshops and seminars and the challenges subsided.

At the beginning of 2008, the church engaged me as a full-time pastor of the Hillbrow BICC branch. When Brethren In Christ Church South Africa became a General Conference in 2011, I was elected as the national overseer (bishop) in practical terms.

It was at this point that we started working with other denominations in order to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ around Hillbrow, Yeoville, Berea and Johannesburg Central.

### Interdenominational ministry begins

We formed an interdenominational group of four churches including BIC Hillbrow; Rock of Ages Ministries and the Church of God Total Deliverance Ministries.

We sponsored big, combined church events, revivals and outreach ministries in and around Hillbrow.

With the collaboration of the South African Police Services (SAPS) we organised very successful marches around Hillbrow against the substance abuse and crime. We also have been involved and participated in crime awareness programs in partnership with the South African Police Services (SAPS) at the Hillbrow Police Station.

Our church building is a voting polling station, something that has made it to become a community church.

Denominational pastors fraternity meetings and night prayers are held at our church, mainly because we are the only church in the area that has a church structure.

Schools and pre-schools hire our church building for graduation and other parents meetings. Different denominations also hire our church building for their conferences and meetings at a minimal charge, just to help us pay for water and electricity.

Community meetings are held at our church without a charge.

The young people of the BICC, Church of God and Rock of Ages churches come together from time to time for big services and night services.

### Peacemaking

From 2011 to date, young people from 14 churches have established what is known as the Rainbow Soccer Christian League. This league is made up of churches from the Brethren In Christ; Assemblies of God; Apostolic Faith Mission, Salvation Army; Faith In God (FIG) Ministries; and Faith and Fire Ministries. Soccer has brought churches together and it has been used as an effective soul-winning tool.

After introducing myself to the Hillbrow Police Station Commander, I was asked to come and preach to policemen and police women at the Hillbrow Police Station. As peacemakers, we are contributing

**We have many opportunities to be peacemakers in our area, working side-by-side with other churches to share the gospel.**

positively to the communities that we are serving as churches.

Together with other churches, we have managed to write papers on the xenophobic attacks and other social ills. This has helped us a lot in our role of being peacemakers in our area.

We have also worked with the community of Zimbabweans in South Africa to bring about crime awareness to the residents and the church members alike. The church has also partnered with NGOs in dealing with depression and trauma in boys and men. And Hillbrow has invited other churches to join us in a soup kitchen that feeds homeless people in our neighbourhood.

Finally BICC has just applied for membership with the South African Council of Churches. This will be a powerful tool in taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to all the corners of the country.



Reverend Benedict Ndlovu is pastor at Brethren In Christ Church in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, in the Republic of South Africa. He serves as his national church's MWC General Council member.



## Indonesia 2021

06-11  
07 2021

bersama-sama mengikuti Yesus melintas batas  
sesarengan ngetut wuri Gusti Yesus nratas wewates  
following Jesus together across barriers  
seguir a Jesús juntos, superando las barreras  
suivre Jésus ensemble à travers les frontières

# Duh Pangeran:

"O prince of Peace, O Holy God and King..." Those words, first penned in Indonesian by Saptjoadi, have rung out in Mennonite worship services around the world since 1978.

"I imagined a big conference with many people from around the world, from the west, from the east," says Saptjoadi.

His American teacher Lawrence Yoder invited the young Indonesian musician to write the song in Javanese to be included in the 1978 Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Assembly song book.

"It's very important to know that we are not alone," Saptjoadi says. "We have many brothers and sisters around the world. We are united in Christ."

Besides welcoming those who visit his home in Banyutowo, Java, Indonesia, he has met those brothers and sisters in the Mennonite family on several journeys abroad: through an International Visitors Exchange Program (IVEP) term in 1973–1974 that took him to a seniors' resident in Oklahoma, a farm in Florida and a camp in Pennsylvania; at the 2009 Assembly in Paraguay; and at the 2015 Assembly in the USA.

In 2009, he served on the international music team alongside participants from Latin America, North America, Europe, and Africa. After a long journey – Jakarta to Frankfurt to Buenos Aires to Asuncion – he was welcomed by a host family who didn't speak any English. Nevertheless, they created memories together as they fellowshiped as members of the same body of Christ.

At the 2015 Assembly in Pennsylvania, he was asked to share his song at a chapel session at the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Akron campus. "It was amazing," he says. "I was so grateful."

Saptjoadi is a pastor in one of the three Indonesian Mennonite member churches of MWC: Gereja Injili Tanah Jawa. He has included 10 of his 30 original songs in a printed songbook *Kidung Rohani* with hand-drawn Western and Indonesian musical notation.

Like his song that is sung in many languages around the world, he says people need to **follow Jesus together across barriers**. "In Indonesia, we have many cultures, many languages, but a lot of tolerance."

Photo:  
Daniel Kristanto Trihandoyo



Indonesia  
2021



Mennonite  
World Conference  
A Community of Anabaptist  
related Churches

Congreso  
Mundial Menonita  
Una Comunidad de  
Iglesias Anabautistas

Conférence  
Mennonite Mondiale  
Une Communauté  
d'Églises Anabaptistes



## ASSEMBLY

### Assembly Scattered

Before and after Assembly Gathered various locations in Indonesia

2-5  
July  
2021

### Global Youth Summit (GYS)

Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia

#### Theme:

Life in the Spirit:  
Learn. Serve.  
Worship.

6-11  
July  
2021

### Assembly Gathered

Holy Stadium, Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia

#### Theme:

Following Jesus  
together across  
barriers



Holy Stadium - JKI

## Assembly Gathered Program

### Music

We will sing different styles of music from Indonesia and around the world. An international team will lead the singing. We will hear special music

from different parts of the globe in plenary sessions and at the Global Church Village. We will learn new songs to take home & share with our communities.



Photo: Liesa Unger

### Morning Program

We will come together each morning to sing, listen to speakers and get to know each other in small groups.



Always Good Coffee.  
Photo: Liesa Unger

### Afternoon activities

In the afternoon we can attend workshops, participate in service opportunities, go on local tours, play sports, enjoy music and exhibits at the Global Church Village or participate in the Anabaptist World Cup.



Batik making. Photo: Liesa Unger



Pening Swamp. Photo: Ivan R. Taya (GKMI Bukit Hermon)



Sam Poo Kong Temple.  
Photo: Yosephine Sulistyorini

### Evening Worship

After supper, we will gather again for an inspiring and creative worship service where we will sing, listen, share gifts, hear speakers, pray and encourage each other.

### Children's All-Day Program

Children will join the morning singing with their families. From there they will be welcomed into their own program in different age groups. The program will involve story telling around the biblical message, there will be games, crafts, singing and tons of fun. The program will include lunch and end before supper.



Unlimited Fire Youth Conference, JKI.  
Photo: Lydia C. Adi

### Teen and Youth Program

Youth will have a special focus during all parts of Assembly. This will include small groups for youth, Young Anabaptist speakers, inspiring music, service opportunities, youth-related themes in workshops, sports activities and hang out time at the Global Church Village. And at the end of each full day, there will be a **bonus** late-evening youth program.



Come to Semarang. Photo: Liesa Unger

## Registration

Registration opens in December 2020

**Registration fee for adults will be** \$550, \$150, \$75 or \$35 US or Rp 500.000,00 depending on country of citizenship. Registration includes lunch and supper, Semarang airport pick-up and drop-off as well as Semarang hotel shuttles to and from Assembly site.

There will be special rates for children, youth, families, volunteers and GYS attendees.

Please see website for more details.

### Lodging, breakfast included

Hotel Rooms:

\$30 to \$50 US room per night

at a 3 to 4 star hotel

Dormitory-style lodging at local school: \$10 US per person per night

### For more information

[Indonesia2021@mw-cmm.org](mailto:Indonesia2021@mw-cmm.org)  
[www.mw-cmm.org](http://www.mw-cmm.org)



Indonesia  
2021

# Peaceful waters: the Mennonite church in the Caribbean

## CARIBBEAN

### Bahamas

Non member

*Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church (Bahamas)*

Baptized Members	28
Congregations	1

### Cuba

MWC member

*Sociedad Misionera Cubana Hermanos en Cristo*

Baptized Members	4259
Congregations	99
President	Luis Hernandez Bermudez

Non member

*Iglesia Menonita en Cuba*

Baptized Members	100
Congregations	10

### Haiti

Non member:

*Assemblée de la Grâce*

Baptized Members	3215
Congregations	20

*Chapelle Évangélique*

Baptized Members	1200
Congregations	15

### Jamaica

MWC member

*Jamaica Mennonite Church*

Baptized Members	704
Congregations	13
President	William George Broughton



**Baptism, Dominican Republic, 2020**

Photo: Mariano Ramirez

**M**ennonites went down in the river to pray 19 January 2020 in the Dominican Republic on Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday. With worship materials from Mennonite World Conference and baptisms, Iglesia Evangelica Menonita in Santo Domingo celebrated the Anabaptist family around the world and locally. Twenty-two people expressed their devotion to following Jesus and commitment to a local – and international – church family.

Across the Dominican Republic, people in the 75 Mennonite congregations remembered the 1525 baptisms of George Blaurock, Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz alongside their own.

Beginning in the 1940s, Anabaptism was introduced to the Caribbean by American Mennonite missionaries. Today Cuba, Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Puerto Rico have national Mennonite churches belonging to MWC membership; Trinidad and Tobago's four-congregation church is an associate member, and clusters of Anabaptist-identifying congregations exist on other islands.

Here is an overview of MWC member churches in the Caribbean.

### Cuba

#### Planting and propagating

In the early 1950s, Anabaptist missionaries from the USA arrived in Cuba: the Brethren in Christ in Cuatro Caminos, near Havana, and the Mennonites (Franconia Conference) near Cardenas.

The Brethren in Christ evangelized in the villages and began a Bible school and Sunday school classes. They were registered in 1954. The Mennonite missionaries outlined a strategy of economic self-support, self-administration and self-propagation of the gospel. They did not seek registration.

In 1959, with the success of the revolution, the 55 registered churches and many unregistered churches continued to operate, but only a select group of new registrations have been accepted since

## Dominican Republic

### MWC member:

#### *Concilio Nacional Menonita Faro Divino*

Baptized Members	2500
Congregations	23
President	Carlos Barranco

#### *Conferencia Evangélica Menonita, Inc.*

Baptized Members	2778
Congregations	75
President	Samuel Omar Medina

### Non member:

#### *Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (Dominican Republic)*

Baptized Members	68
Congregations	4

#### *Consejo Evangélico Menonita Dominicana*

Baptized Members	274
Congregations	6

#### *Hermanos en Cristo República Dominicana*

Baptized Members	957
Congregations	15

## Puerto Rico

### MWC member

#### *Convención de las Iglesias Menonitas de Puerto Rico, Inc.*

Baptized Members	547
Congregations	12
President	Juan Carlos Colón

### Non member

#### *Misión Evangélica Menonita del Caribe*

Baptized Members	137
Congregations	6

## Trinidad and Tobago

### Associate member

#### *The Mennonite Church of Trinidad and Tobago*

Baptized Members	250
Congregations	4
President	Deolal Ramdial

Source: Global statistics – 2018 MWC Directory

the late 1990s. After 1959, North American missionaries left the country, along with many Cuban church leaders. Other Cuban leaders like Juana M. García emerged to continue to serve the Brethren in Christ church (Iglesia de Los Hermanos in Cristo, Cuba) despite the challenges.

In 1992, the Cuban constitution was changed from an atheist state to a secular (lay) state. This shift resulted in the rapid growth of the church, especially the evangelical wing of the churches. Various groups came to Cuba as a result of this change.

Today, the Brethren in Christ Church is the only registered Anabaptist church in Cuba. Most of its 100 churches are house churches. More than 700 cell groups function alongside the organized congregations. They have a leadership training centre in Palmira, Cuba; MCC and the Be in Christ Church Canada are helping to provide leadership training for pastors and leaders.

Another Mennonite group, around Holguin and Santiago, relates to the Conservative Mennonite Conference out of Rosedale, Ohio, USA. The original work initiated by the Franconia Conference continues as well. Both of these Mennonite relatively small groups are active as witnesses to the gospel in their regions. Neither group is officially registered with the government.

### Challenges

The Cuban Anabaptist-related groups are growing. They require leadership training and support; they are working at issues of Anabaptist identity; they have difficulty getting land designated for church buildings.

Brethren in Christ bishop Luis Bermudez Hernandez says the revolution gave a great gift to the church: it created the conditions to focus on house churches, which are easy to invite neighbours to visit. This strategy has resulted in dramatic growth.

## Dominican Republic

### Planting and propagating

The Dominican Evangelical Mennonite Conference was started as an initiative of the Evangelical Mennonite Church from Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA (today known as the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches). In 1946, they sent Omar and Laura Sutton along with Lucille Rupp as missionaries. When they arrived in a small community called El Cercado, Omar Sutton along with

a few members from the nascent church and some other men built the first aqueduct in the city, thereby significantly improving the lives of the people.

Other missionaries added to the work in the field, planting new churches.

The national leadership had become strong by 1970 since by way of an agreement known as the de Monte Río Accord which was signed in the city of Azua, the Evangelical Mennonite Church decided to hand over the work of the national church to the executive committee of Conferencia Evangelica Menonita Inc.

### Challenges

One of the greatest challenges for the church is to remain faithful to the sound doctrine that has come from the radical Anabaptism of the 16th century where they were faithful to the Word of God in spite of the consequences. Another challenge is to continue sowing the Word of God amongst the Dominican population in honour of our national symbol since we are the only country that has an open Bible on the national flag, opened to John 8:32: "And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

Another challenge is leadership development. Pastors study at the Mennonite seminary or take a bachelor of theology at Universidad Evangelica Dominicana, but most work outside the church to earn a salary.

The most important contribution that the Dominican Anabaptists have made is through forming members that are willing to be true servants within the context where they live. For this reason, a strong presence of Anabaptist members can be seen in most of the Christian service organizations in the Dominican Republic.

Our vision and hope for the future: continue building the Anabaptist vision; build young leaders to take the baton from previous generations; strengthen our churches by conserving and increasing their membership.

## Puerto Rico

### Planting and propagating

Convención de las Iglesias Menonitas de Puerto Rico, Inc. (CIMPR) is the organization that represents and leads the Mennonite churches in Puerto Rico. The CIMPR goes back to 1943 when the North American Mennonite Church sought opportunities to "serve and build" rather than participate in the Second World War.



This was why a number of Mennonites came to the La Plata neighborhood in Aibonito in 1943 with the intention to work in agriculture, health and social work projects.

Their testimonies motivated many to give their lives to the Lord, and so the fellowship in La Plata came to be. The church spread the gospel through health clinics, evangelical services, Sunday school, Vacation Bible Schools and personal works.

Upon request, the Mennonite Mission Board based out of Elkhart, Indiana, USA, sent missionaries to organize the first churches. In 1946, Betania Church in the Pulguillas de Coamo neighborhood was born, followed by Calvary Church in La Plata de Aibonito in 1947, Esmirna church in the Coamo Arriba de Coamo neighbourhood in 1948, and Palo Hincado church in the neighbourhood of Barranquitas in 1949.

A total of 16 churches were planted around the island with 900 members. Twelve of those are still active today.

### Challenges

Today the Mennonite Church in Puerto Rico faces a variety of challenges, like planting new churches to ensure growth across the island. Also, the influence of other doctrines challenges the Mennonite family to discern and affirm our shared and united identity as a Christ-centred church. At the same time, the influence of some of these doctrines has enriched the life and mission of the Mennonites in a number of ways.

The Mennonite and Anabaptist church significantly contributed toward the development of agriculture, livestock farming and education. But by far, the greatest inheritance has been the spreading the gospel and the health clinics that were the seeds from which a number of current hospitals were born.

With God's blessing and the power of the Holy Spirit, the Mennonite church in Puerto Rico will continue to show the way and overcome the challenges so that the gospel of Christ can continue to spread.

## Jamaica

### Planting

General Conference Mennonite minister David H. Loewen and his wife Anna, from Manitoba, Canada, came to Jamaica. "The Lord said to us that a mission station should be opened in Jamaica or Cuba," Anna Loewen said. The Loewens got the assurance that it should be Jamaica and

they moved in 1954.

Mahlon Blosser, Myron Augsburg and Warren Metzler of Virginia Mennonite Mission came across the Loewens on an exploratory visit to Jamaica and soon established a work there.

After preliminary discussions and planning, on July 10, 1955, the church received 15 members by confession of faith and 11 by baptism. This baptism held in Kingston Harbour marks the birth of Jamaica Mennonite Church.

In the late 1970s, foreign missionaries were no longer granted work permit, so all the churches are now led by local pastors and laity.

### Propagating

Today, the congregations of JMC are engaged open air/evangelistic meetings are held in areas where there are no churches; operate a weekly 15-minute radio program "The Way to Life" that presents the gospel and words of encouragement; and offer periodic health clinic with trained medical professionals offering maternal and child health care, immunization, blood pressure and diabetes screening. With government approval, two congregations operate early childhood education institutes and four pastors serve as guidance counsellors in local schools.

Jamaica Mennonite Church (JMC) shares fraternal relationships with Mennonite Church Trinidad and Tobago (MCTT) and Virginia Mennonite Conference (VMC).

### Challenges

Jamaica has the most churches per square mile of any country in the world, with more than 1 600 churches representing 438 registered denominations for a population of about 2.8 million people. Yet fewer people are opting for theological training and church leadership.

Urban drift seeking educational opportunities and employment depletes rural churches of their members, and influences from Canada, England and the USA sometimes conflict with what is best for Jamaicans.

Jamaica Mennonite Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is committed to honouring and glorifying God in our worship and devotion, through the study of the Word of God, through our lifestyle and fellowship together; through evangelism and missions of peace.

We seek to make disciples of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

## Trinidad and Tobago

Mennonites first came to Trinidad in the 1960s with a radio broadcast and medical treatment for Hansen's disease (leprosy). The first congregation of Trinidad Mennonite Church was birthed in 1974. Over the years, Virginia Mennonite Mission sent workers, but the 5 congregations that make up the church today are served by local leadership.

### Contributors:

Juan Carlos Colón, moderador, Convención de las Iglesias Menonitas de Puerto Rico, Inc.

William Broughton, president, Jamaica Mennonite Church

Robert J. Suderman, retired, Mennonite Church Canada, Mennonite World Conference

Also: GAMEO, VMM



Members of the Chaguanas Mennonite Church, Trinidad, distribute gifts and Bibles in their community on Christmas morning as part of their outreach ministry.

Photo: Galen Lehman

### Prayers for ecumenical dialogue

How come church dialogue is so hard and yet so filled with joy?

#YouAreHere  
#BlessUsNow

Members of the family of God play their part so differently than mine; help us trust you  
#GreatConductor  
#SymphonyOfLife

Please help us as we do this holy work of being the church united; worshipping together, working together, loving together  
#OneGod  
#OneChurch

Prayers submitted by Carol Penner, assistant professor of theological studies, Conrad Grebel University, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. She blogs at [leadinginworship.com](http://leadinginworship.com)



# Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday 2020



Regensburg Mennonite Church combined Sunday brunch with a family church service.

Photo: Liesa Unger

## MWC team changes

The MWC team welcomes Elina Ciptadi Perkins as interim chief communications director, joining Karla Braun (now full-time) on the team while Kristina Toews is on maternity leave. Alexandro Marthin continues to serve as social media coordinator in a volunteer capacity and Yosephine Sulistyorini does graphic design from Indonesia.

Joining the team working from the Kitchener office in Ontario, Canada, Shirley Redekop begins her half-time role as chief development officer 23 March 2020. Arli Klassen completes her work in that role and will continue to serve the global church as regional representatives coordinator.



Photo: Elina Ciptadi Perkins



Photo: Shirley Redekop





On 2 February 2020, Communauté Evangelique Mennonite celebrated Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday with joy. The congregations of Ditalala and Sangilayiheld joint services attended by five nearby congregations and ecumenical guests representing Pentecostal and Baptist churches.

Photo: Jean Félix Cimbanga

Travelling for hours in wooden canoes, on horseback and in trucks, nothing stopped the Anabaptist family from celebrating with praise, worship and prayer in El Rama, Nicaragua. The churches of Iglesia del Dios Viviente de la Convención Menonita de Nicaragua gave thanks to God for the first Anabaptists who gave their lives and passed on a radical identity as messengers of peace.

Photo: Abel Mendoza



Hoi Thanh Mennonite Church, Vietnam.

Photo: courtesy Hoi Thanh Mennonite Church



“When we are one in our diversity we show who God is,” said César García. He preached on hope and unity in the body of Christ at Grantham Mennonite Brethren Church, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, where 10 congregations from three denominations participated in the celebration.

Photo: Rob Patterson

## Lamentations 3:21–26

## Psalm 62

## Mark 2:1–12

## Ephesians 1:15–19

Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday is an opportunity to remind our communities of faith that we are all part of one body made up of many tribes, languages and nations (Revelation 7:9). On this day, we celebrate that, in Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the cultural and national boundaries that separate us have been overcome by the cross.

In 2020, the theme was “Jesus Christ, our hope,” prepared by the North American churches.

Even in the midst of deep troubles, we come together from around the world to follow Jesus, who gives us hope.



# Meet your Global Anabaptist Service Network (GASN)



## Serving in Jesus' name

As our churches live out their call to witness to God's good news by acting as God's hands and feet on earth, they may develop agencies to specialize in meeting those needs. These agencies participate in the Global Anabaptist Service Network (GASN) within the Mennonite World Conference family.

## GASN vision

A global network of Anabaptist-related church agencies and organizations committed to the holistic gospel of Jesus Christ and the mission of the church through service ministries in our communities, nations and world as expressed in the *Shared Convictions* of Mennonite World Conference.

Serving "in Jesus' name," two examples of the 52 GASN agencies are Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Associação Menonita de Assistência Social (AMAS).

Operating out of North America, MCC works with local partners around the world to respond to basic human needs and work for peace and justice. They address health, water, education, peace, restorative justice, disaster relief, and refugees in more than 50 countries. MCC has six sponsoring Anabaptist denominations in Canada and seven in the USA. This year, MCC celebrates its 100th year of service in the name of Christ.

In Brazil, AMAS was formed out of Igreja Evangélica Menonita to support children living in poverty in Parana state and to help them reach their full physical, mental, spiritual and social potential through educational, sports and cultural activities based on Christian values. AMAS developed partnerships with Protestant churches in Germany and other churches in Brazil to support their work. Today, AMAS serves more than 1 300 children in nine facilities.

## AMAS supports children living in poverty.

Photo: courtesy of AMAS

## Mission

The Global Anabaptist Service Network (GASN) seeks to strengthen the capacity of Anabaptist churches and their agencies to reach out in service to "the widow, the orphan, and the alien" as witness to God's love and compassion for all and to seek transformation and promote justice in our communities.

It operates under the guidance of the Mission Commission which seeks to recapture in every part of the church the apostolic vision of the whole body of Christ engaged in faithful discipleship, filled with the Holy Spirit, and reaching out to all those around us and beyond us to whom the Lord leads us.

The objectives of the Global Anabaptist Service Network are:

## Connection

- Provide a space for service agencies and organizations to connect with each other
- Promote awareness and understanding of the work of GASN members as ministries of the church
- Provide opportunities for the global Anabaptist church to give counsel to GASN members

## Collaboration

- Encourage better and stronger collaboration among member agencies and organizations
- Increase channels of communication and interaction among members
- Work together to accomplish more than members could individually
- Honour the gifts of all members regardless of their size

## Capacity building

- Share best practices and lessons learned among members

- Provide opportunities for training, growth and development
- Reflect together on what it means to be an Anabaptist service agency
- Learn about global needs and how to respond effectively

## Guiding Values

The Global Anabaptist Service Network is guided by these values:

- **Commitment:** Walking with people who are marginalized is an essential part of God's commandments (Deuteronomy 26:12, Matthew 25:31–46).
- **Dignity:** All members have needs and all members have value to contribute (2 Corinthians 8).
- **Unity:** All members belong to one Body; if one part suffers every part suffers with it (1 Corinthians 12).
- **Life and witness:** All members are called to be salt and light, announcing and living out the Kingdom of God wherever they are.

## Membership

A global network of Anabaptist-related The Global Anabaptist Service Network is a global coalition of Anabaptist church-related service agencies and organizations. Its members are involved in service ministries beyond the congregation, self-identified as Anabaptist with formal commitment to the MWC Shared Convictions, and have a priority ministry that fits within a broad definition of service (e.g., relief, development, healthcare, peacemaking and justice).

Which organizations are part of GASN? Find out here: <https://mwc-cmm.org/gasn/>

## 2020 Peace Sunday

**When one member suffers, all members suffer: peace as accompaniment and solidarity**

**Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, Ruth 1:1–17, Ephesians 4:1–6, Galatians 6:1–5**

**20 September 2020**

Download the worship resources from the website ([www.mwc-cmm.org/peacesunday](http://www.mwc-cmm.org/peacesunday)) to use in your worship service. — *Peace Commission*



## Postponed

### Renewal 2027

**Jesus Christ, Our Hope: Intercultural Conversations and Celebrations**

**A taste of the global Anabaptist-Mennonite church in Abbotsford**

**28–29 March 2020**

Columbia Bible College,  
Abbotsford, B.C., Canada

Saturday featured worship, music and intercultural workshops on pastoral themes. Sunday was devoted to worship, music and testimonies on the theme of “Jesus Christ, Our Hope.”

Workshops:

- Hope in the midst of global climate change
- Reconciliation in a polarized and fractured world
- Hope in the face of loneliness
- Intercultural leadership as an expression of hope
- Evangelism in a pluralistic culture
- Faith formation in an intercultural context

See the October 2020 Courier for testimonies and teaching from this event.

## President's column

# Grace at the heart of our witness

“Early Anabaptists practiced foot washing just like Benedictines do today!” exclaimed [Father] Augustinus [Sander], a Benedictine monk I met in Switzerland. He had just looked up Michael Sattler on the Internet.

“Not surprising,” I said, “since Sattler came from the Benedictine order.”

Sattler was the primary author of the influential 1527 *Schleitheim Articles*, in which Anabaptists called for truth-telling, rejection of violence, accountability to community, separation of church and state, and holy living in obedience to Jesus – all of which sounded to brother Augustinus like the practices of his religious order.

Early Anabaptists left or were expelled from monasteries and congregations of the Roman Catholic church, often in painful or even lethal circumstances. But Anabaptists retained this very monastic ideal: that it is possible – essential – for Christians to take seriously the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–6) and other teachings of the New Testament about ethics, nonviolence, community, and holiness.

Anabaptists did not so much want to get rid of monastic ideals of disciplined lifestyle; rather, they wanted *all* Christians to live in monk-like obedience to Jesus.

I rejoice that Mennonite, Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed and other Christians today often find ways to fellowship and collaborate as sisters and brothers in Christ. We have much to learn from Augustinus and from others around the world who share the high standard of obedience to the way of Jesus.



**Nelson and Fr Augustinus.**

Photo: supplied by J. Nelson Kraybill

Augustinus and I both were ecumenical guests at a gathering of Lutherans. Ask Lutherans what is distinctive about their tradition, and most likely you will hear, “salvation by faith through grace.”

Mennonites also believe that.

But sometimes we so much emphasize peacemaking and service as hallmarks of the gospel that we forget grace. We forget that we still are sinners whose right relationship with God and with fellow humans comes only by grace through power of the Holy Spirit, not by our fine efforts.



**J. Nelson Kraybill is president of MWC (2015–2021). He lives in Indiana, USA.**

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- Enable and expand communication strategies to nurture a worldwide family of faith,
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Photo: Karla Braun

## Jesus' credibility

I was walking across a bridge one day and I saw a man standing on the edge, about to jump off. So, I ran over and said, "Stop! Don't do it!"

"Why shouldn't I?" he asked.

"Well, there's so much to live for."

"Like what?"

"Well, are you religious?" He said yes.

I said, "Me too! Are you Christian or Buddhist?"

"Christian."

"Me too! Are you Catholic or Protestant?"

"Protestant."

"Me too! Are you Episcopalian or Baptist?"

"Baptist."

"Wow, me too! Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?"

"Baptist Church of God!"

"Me too! Are you original Baptist Church of God, or are you Reformed Baptist Church of God?"

"Reformed Baptist Church of God!"

"Me too! Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1879, or Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1915?"

He said, "Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1915!"

I said, "Die, heretic," and pushed him off."

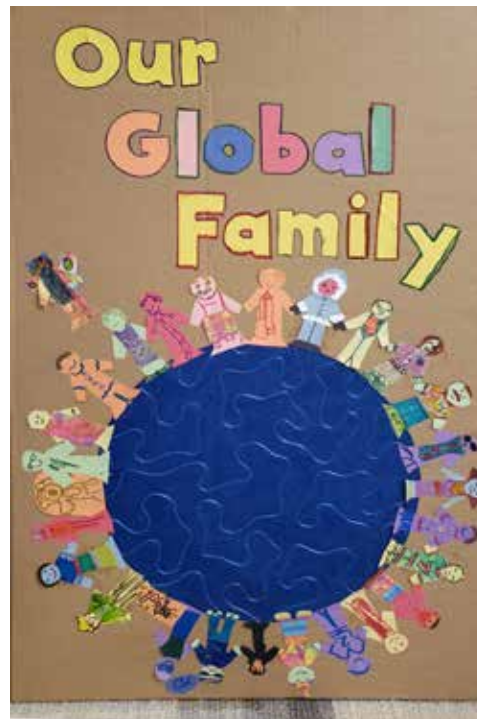
### Divisions in the body of Christ

The former story is a joke, written by comedian Emo Phillips, named the 44<sup>th</sup> funniest joke of all time by GQ in 1999.

In a humorous way, Phillips illustrates very well how the world perceives divisions in the Body of Christ. They just don't make sense in an entity that speaks about love, forgiveness and reconciliation. Furthermore, fragmentation in the church questions the validity of its whole message.

As a matter of fact Jesus himself linked the credibility of his life to the quality of relationships among his followers: "that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me..." (John 17:23).

The way we relate with other churches has a direct impact in our missional witness. That is one reason, among many others, why Mennonite World Conference engages churches of other Christian traditions in dialogue. The credibility of Jesus is more important for us than our doctrinal, ethical or martyrdom pride.



Children at First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ont., Canada, created this cardboard poster, about 30 cm x 45 cm (12 inches x 18 inches), as part of their Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday service..

Photo: Arli Klassen

### Too precious to keep for ourselves

This does not mean that we negotiate our distinctives as Anabaptists. We value our convictions, our ethics and our past in a way that allow us to share them with others without fear. What we have received in our experience of following Christ is too precious to keep it only for ourselves.

Other Christians from different traditions learn from us in our dialogues as we also learn from them and from the rich gifts of their traditions.

This exchange makes us strong in our identity and humble in our experience of following Christ.

In this issue of the *Courier*, we have chosen to highlight our experience of dialogue with other Christian churches because it is in conversation that we build identity and value or own tradition.

It is my prayer that as a global church we always remember that God's Spirit has been working through his church before Reformation of the 16th century and beyond the geographic limits of our church.



César García, MWC general secretary, originally from Colombia, lives in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.